



## Nathaniel Mackey

### ongoingness

*The precarious of one's life changes things. I couldn't take the endlessly ongoing as given. This realization brought a keener sense of urgency to my writing. I have sought out a state of what I refer to as "all-day music," training my mind to always be on call, should something inspire me to write, and to remain open to any form of inspiration: I like interruptions. I like the writing to be situated within the realm of my ordinary life. I am constantly toggling between everyday activities and the world I have been constructing in my head.*

Poesy Café  
June 19, 2021  
Presenter: Tom Corrado

### Why Nathaniel Mackey?

A few weeks ago I stumbled upon a review of a just-released book of poems titled Double Trio by Nathaniel Mackey, a poet I had never heard of. Double Trio actually consists of three volumes of poetry: Tej Bet, So's Notice, and Nerve Church. It's a HUGE boxed set: 976 pages, \$50! According to one blurb, Double Trio is structured in part after the last three musical movements of John Coltrane's Meditations - Love, Consequence, and Serenity - and stretches Mackey's explorations and improvisations of free jazz into unprecedeted poetic territory.

The review included this quote from Mackey: "I turned sixty-five within a couple of months of beginning to write Double Trio and I was within a couple of months

of turning seventy-one when I finished it. . . . It was a period of distress and precarity inside and outside both. During this time, a certain disposition or dispensation came upon me that I would characterize or sum up with the words "all day music." It was a time in which I wanted never not to be thinking between poetry and music, poetry and the daily or the everyday, the everyday and the alter-everyday. Philosophically and technically, the work meant to be always pertaining to the relation of parts to one another and of parts to an evolving whole."

NPR's Ken Chen was quoted in the review as saying "For decades, National Book Award-winner Mackey has devoted himself to creating a long poem that covers ambitious territory - and he begins this installment by recalling how early free jazz musicians re-invented the multi-disc record collection because they needed several albums to record their fertile improvisations; you might say that Double Trio is Mackey's multi-disc box set. Double Trio is a libretto of metaphysical music and probably the most important poetry collection to come out [in 2021]."

Intrigued to say the least I began googling Nathaniel Mackey and unearthed articles, reviews, poems, and a wonderful profile piece in the April 12, 2021 issue of *The New Yorker*.

I was hooked. Here was a poet who loved jazz working on a massive chunk of poetry!

#### Bio

Poet, novelist, literary critic, anthologist, editor, dj, and professor Nathaniel Mackey was born in 1947 in Miami, Florida, and raised in Southern California. He earned his BA from Princeton and his PhD from Stanford. He taught and lived in Santa Cruz from 1979 to 2010, served as a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets from 2001 to 2007, and is currently Reynolds Price professor of English and Creative Writing at Duke University. Mackey lives in Durham, North Carolina with his wife, Pascale Gaitet, Professor Emerita in French Literature at UC Santa Cruz, and their two sons.

#### Books

#### Poetry

- 1978 Four for Trane
- 1983 Septet for the End of Time
- 1985 Eroding Witness
- 1993 School of Udhra
- 1998 Whatssaid Serif
- 2006 Splay Anthem
- 2011 Nod House
- 2015 Blue Fasa

2021 Double Trio: Tej Bet, So's Notice, Nerve Church

Fiction

1986 Bedouin Hornbook  
1993 Djbot Baghoustus's Run  
2001 Atet A. D.  
2008 Bass Cathedral  
2017 Late Arcade

Criticism

1993 Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing  
2004 Paracritical Hinge: Essays, Talks, Notes, Interviews

Other

1992 Moment's Notice: Jazz in Poetry and Prose

Awards

1993 Whiting Award  
2006 National Book Award for Poetry  
2007 Foundation for Contemporary Arts Grants to Artists  
2008 African American Literature and Culture Society Stephen Henderson Award  
2010 Guggenheim Fellowship  
2014 Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize  
2015 Bollingen Prize for American Poetry  
2016 William B. Hart Residency in Poetry  
2017 Rebekah Johnson Bobbitt National Poetry Prize

Mackey's Poetic Voice

Mackey works at the intersection of literature and music in the areas of modern and postmodern literature, creative writing, poetry and poetics. His poetry combines African mythology, African-American musical traditions, and Modernist poetic experimentation, and is strongly influenced by the Black Mountain poets, who believed that poetry should be driven by the human rhythms of breath and utterance. He subscribes to their "open field" approach of remaining receptive to poetry wherever it might be, however it might help one gain "leverage" on present-day life. His several ongoing serial projects explore the relationship of poetry and historical memory, as well as the ritual power of poetry and song.

Mackey's academic work brought the Black Mountain Poets into conversation with Afro-Caribbean writers. Both sets of writers sought to free long-suppressed

histories and languages, trying to reckon with the impossibility of ever representing the past through straightforward language.

Influenced by Charles Olson's question as to what role poetry might play in helping us access, understand, and represent the distant past, Mackey insists that poetry is capacious enough to embrace the combined approach of making it up and plumbing its depths.

Mackey cites poets William Carlos Williams and Amiri Baraka, in addition to jazz musicians John Coltrane and Don Cherry, as early influences in his exploration of how language can be infused and informed by music. In a 2006 interview with Bill Forman for MetroActive magazine, Mackey addressed the relationship he seeks between music and his own poetry: "I try to cultivate the music of language, which is not just sounds. It's also meaning and implication. It's also nuance. It's also a kind of angular suggestion."

David Hajdu described Mackey's writing as "not simply writing about jazz, but writing as jazz, characterizing the movement of language as "kinetic and also contemplative, elegiac and mercurial, sometimes volatile." (The New York Times Book Review, 2007)

Duke University's Joseph Donohue suggested that readers just coming to Mackey's poetic work will find themselves in the midst of an unfolding adventure with multiple overlapping lifetimes. "It's a world of voyages, departures, arrivals, encounters, visits to and from the dead, visits to and from paradise. We're wandering like we're in the *Odyssey*, but we're never quite sure who we're with, or where, ultimately, we're going." (Poetry Foundation Interview, 2014)

The language of exegesis is crucial to Mackey's poems. Part of the hopefulness that continually surfaces in his poetry requires that someone can wrest meaning out of the phrase, that suddenly a whole new thing opens up. The exegete is a kind of salvific figure who is constantly showing that meaning is continually revealing itself or opening itself to possibilities. (Donohue, 2014)

Mackey's poetry is like an archive of all that the world forgot, what might have been had humans resisted the desire to enslave and colonize one another. It's also an archive of the world as Mackey has taken it in, from concerts and records to poems and lyrical scraps from old anthropology textbooks to the utterances of his friends and family members. (Hsu, The New Yorker, April 12, 2021)

The sense of style and cadence in Mackey's poems seems deeply unified and woven together, . . . these are people talking all the time. They are making jokes. They are needling each other. There is this sense that they know each other well. And that there is this playfulness, but that, also, there is this discursiveness going back and forth. (Donohue, 2014)

Mackey's poems are typically presented typographically as "clumps of three to five lines, no more, each between six and twelve syllables, completed by a single syllable hanging by itself in the right margin like a toe." (Frere-Jones, Bookforum, June/July/August 2021)

As here:

Again the Insofar-I stood apart,  
Remnant of a remnant, singled out.  
One heard a horn parse harmonics,  
  end-  
    lessly take its time, world up in  
flames as it quibbled, a beginner  
again it seemed.... Praised option  
notwithstanding something sad held  
  it,  
wondered why get excited, why upset ...

According to poet Robin Blaser, "Mackey's work is a brilliant renewal of and experiment with the language of our spiritual condition and a measure of what poetry gives in trust - 'heart's/meat' and the rush of language to bear it."

Poet, critic, and 2020 MacArthur Fellow Fred Moten, opines: "Mackey often sounds tranquil and digressive when he reads, as though he's working out a series of anagrams on the fly. It's not the kind of release, when you think that someone has said what you always thought. It's more like What is that?"

Again, Moten: "You read a Mackey poem the first time and there's all this richness. Then you go back the thirty-seventh time, and what you discover is not the true meaning. What you discover is that all that's left to find is way more than you'll ever have time to find. It's more than you could ever have imagined. It's an amazing thing to see the whole thing and a detail of the thing at the same time."

Mackey's poetry is a poetry of process, a sense of "ongoingness" that is never finished, never done, as exemplified not only by Double Trio's 976 pages but also by two ongoing serial poems that Mackey has been working on for about forty-seven years: "Song of the Andoumboulou" and "Mu." He started "Song of the Andoumboulou" in the mid-seventies after he heard a recording of funeral chants from the Dogon people of Mali. The poems, of which there are now more than three hundred, explore the Dogon belief in what Mackey calls a "rough draft of a human being, the work-in-progress we continue to be." "Mu," a series of three-hundred poems that he began at roughly the same time, was originally a tribute to the trumpeter Don Cherry but then unfurled into a decades-long trancelike vision of the origins of music and mythology. He has also written five epistolary novels as part of a thirty-year-old open-ended prose project titled "From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate" consisting of letters written by

N., a jazz musician in nineteen-seventies and eighties Los Angeles, to someone or something called the Angel of Dust, about the progress of a band he has formed.

For Mackey, a poem is a kind of society, made up of sound, sense, and the look of the poem on the page. It is not a discrete piece of writing. It is not a sealed-off ode. A poem is infinitely tweakable, finetunable, not unlike a piece of free jazz where musicians continue to pull more and more song out of an old piece of music (Think John Coltrane's "My Favorite Things").

Here's Mackey in his own words . . .

*/Coltrane's/ moved on, so I gotta follow him.*

*How different can two things be and still have something in common?*

*Some poets get that "sigh of recognition" when they perform. I try not to have that happen. Audiences never know when I'm done.*

*I think serial work not only keeps that sense of getting started alive but probably intensifies it as one goes along. In some ways I feel more like I'm just beginning now than I did 30 years ago, partly because I have a bigger sense of what's in motion, what's moving, what the different strands and strains are.*

*My poetry is/ a poetry of process and a poetry of finding your way, a poetry of opening a way, but finding that what you found opens out into more stuff than the initial occurrences of it reported. It's a way of living with what you've written, in some way living through what you've written, but also having an interaction with lived experience, not only of things outside the text but the text itself, the way they talk to one another, inform each other, tweak each other, goose each other.*

*I consider myself not a terribly visual person. I'm just really not. I don't seek out the visual arts in the way I seek out music.*

*The ability to get into something that initially is forbidding or intimidating or just doesn't speak to you at all is one that is tested and proven. I tend to stay with things which may, on first or second or third hearing or reading, present me with difficulties that make it seem like it isn't going to go anywhere.*

*What any experimental art is trying to get you to do is move beyond your preconceptions and your expectations regarding what should be happening, what's going to happen, what kinds of effects it should have, and enter a luminal state in which those things can be re-defined in the way that the particular artist or piece of art is proposing.*

*... I think figures accrue to and build on feeling, and it's no doubt the case that orphaning speaks of and from an emotional disposition I'm both inclined toward and see applying beyond myself. The orphan is such an archetypal figure, recurrent not only in my work but in world culture, because it tugs at the roots of our sense of belonging and the mix of anxiety and solace that goes with that sense.* (The Iowa Review, Winter 2014/2015)

*Drift is the tension and play between spirit and matter. Spirit wants to be unbound. It's the tension between spirit and letter as well, the play between spirit and letter, the tangential way of knowing that the expression "you get my drift" gets at, not to mention the turns spirit and letter take toward each other and away from each other. Language, especially poetic language, replicates or is infused with the relationship between spirit and matter, the traffic between spirit and letter, its analogue.* (The Iowa Review, Winter 2014/2015)

*... to the extent that categories and the way things are defined - the boundaries between things, people, areas of experience, areas of endeavor - to the extent that those categories and definitions are rooted in social and political realities, anything one does that challenges them, that transgresses those boundaries and offers new definitions, is to some extent contributing to social change.* (Callaloo, Spring 2000)

*I think that the audience for poetry has widened in recent years and maybe it's continuing to widen - I hope so. The whole poetry slam phenomenon has created an interest and widened the audience for poetry in significant ways. There's a lot that needs to be done, obviously. But poetry is one of those things that just won't go away, and people keep rediscovering it. I think every generation has a poetry boom, or gives a boom to poetry, gives itself to poetry. There is also a growing sense that poetry has great variety to it, that there are many ways of going about it. I think with the recognition of that variousness, there's been a growth in the audience.* (Publisher's Weekly, November 2006)

*... The song does remember the deceased, and it's the song that helps the deceased move on - to ascend, in the words of the poem, to the next life. I wanted to take that and apply it to senses of transition and, hopefully, ascendance within life, moments where one feels one has to move on and move up. I didn't know it would become an ongoing, theoretically endless series.* (The Paris Review, Spring 2020)

*Listen to Cecil Taylor's music. All that rumbling. You know, that sense of coming up from below, all that thunder. Sounds of wrath. There's a challenge and a dare, a kind of discontent in what Cecil's doing. He's saying, You gotta do better. You gotta listen more closely. You gotta be more focused. That sound announces that we're going to a different place.*

*You build this place. You're making this place, it takes time to lay it out, stock it, to walk around in it, to get to know it. The farther I step into it, the easier*

*it's become to find more places within. Doors open, lead to other doors. It's a place I like. I guess it's why I'm staying....*

*The world, music reminds us, inhabits while extending beyond what meets the eye, resides in but rises above what is apprehensible to the senses.*

*But every now and then, when the flow's not coming, you gotta get up from your couch or the desk, you gotta go out on the porch, look up at the sky and enjoy the humility of just taking in this obviously superior and more complex creativity. What we do could never match that. Could I ever write a poem as intricate as a pinecone?*

*Takeaway...*

*For Mackey, a POEM is...*

- a process of finding your way, of opening a way that opens to many ways
- a work in progress
- ongoing, never finished, never done, infinitely tweakable
- unhampered by the need for closure
- unbound by storyline, stretching out to explore sights and sounds
- a cultivation of the music of language
- ritualistic songmaking
- filled primarily with musicians and even those who aren't still use jazz and improvising musicians as reference points
- a sense of place at the intersection of literature and music filled with people conversing about and arguing over where they are, where they're going, where they've been
- a kind of society made up of sound, sense, and appearance
- an excavation of historical memory
- a search for segues, resonances, juxtapositions
- an aid to acquiring "leverage" on present-day life
- writing as jazz, the music of language that is kinetic, contemplative, elegiac, mercurial, volatile
- meaning and implication, nuance, a kind of angular suggestion
- an unfolding adventure with multiple overlapping lifetimes
- a world of voyages, departures, arrivals, encounters, visits to and from the dead, visits to and from paradise

### **Selected Poems**

#### **Song of the Andoumboulou: 55**

—orphic fragment—

Carnival morning they

were Greeks in Brazil,  
Africans in Greek  
disguise. Said of herself

she

was born in a house in  
heaven. He said he was  
born in the house next  
door... They were in hell.  
In Brazil they were  
lovebait.  
To abide by hearing was  
what love was... To  
love was to hear without  
looking. Sound was the  
beloved's  
mummy cloth... All to say,  
said the exegete, love in  
hell was a voice, to be spoken  
to from behind, not be able  
to turn and look... It  
wasn't Greece where they

were,

nor was it Benin... Carnival  
morning in made-up hell, bodies  
bathed in loquat light, would-be  
song's all the more would-be  
title, "Sound and Cerement,"

voice

wound in bandages  
raveling  
lapse

.

Up all night, slept well  
past noon. Awoke restless  
having dreamt she awoke on  
Lone Coast, wondering  
afterwards what it came  
to,  
glimpsed interstice,  
crevice,  
crack... Saw her  
dead mother and brother  
pull up in a car, her brother  
at the wheel not having driven

while alive, newly taught  
by  
death it appeared. A fancy car,  
bigger  
than any her mother had had while  
alive, she too better off it  
appeared... A wishful read, "it  
appeared" notwithstanding, the  
exegete impossibly benign. Dreamt  
a dream  
of dream's end, anxious, unannounced,  
Eronel's nevermore namesake, Monk's  
anagrammatic Lenore... That the  
dead return in luxury cars made  
us  
weep, pathetic its tin elegance,  
pitiable,  
sweet read misread,  
would-be  
sweet

#### Song of the Andoumboulou 60

The vote came in early. We ignored  
it. No ballot-box auction for us...  
Nub's uninstructed dance's bare  
feet, music we took them for.

At a  
loss with only bodies to fend with,  
nonsonant waves kept coming,  
sang without wind, saltless,  
waterless, Nub's inverted  
run, Nub newly vented by horns  
blown  
elsewhere, bells full of insect  
husks... Nonsonant scruff held  
on to, sheerness... Nothingness  
it seemed we grabbed at, gathered,  
beginning to be unending it seemed.

We  
were beginning to be lured again,  
ready to be hectored, huthered, move  
on, beginning to be uprooted again...

A peppered expanse the country we  
crossed. Space doled out so stingily

we wept, love's numb extremity  
the outskirts of Nuh, name whose  
elision

we embraced... A tale told many  
times over, known before it reached  
us, known before we knew, un-  
backed alley of soul we wandered  
into,

shadowbox romance it was called...  
Come of late to creation's outskirts,  
rub's new muse a republic of none, a  
yet-to-be band the band we were...  
We were Andoumboulou, dreamt

in-

habitants of "mu," moored but  
immersed, real but made up, so much  
farther flung than we'd have thought...  
They the would-be we lay on a bed  
the size of Outlandish. Lip attesting  
lip, tongue rummaging tongue,  
took  
between finger and thumb the hem  
of her dress, flat bead of sweat, salted  
cloth...

A hammer hit them each on the head.  
Hammered heads rang and rang without  
end... Called it creation, called it  
their clime, close where there was otherwise  
distance, mute endearment, recondite  
embrace... So much farther, felt even

so,

mouth she remembered, home. His to hear  
her tell it, hers were it his to say, whose  
book was of lengthening limbs, hers of  
the  
unquenchable kiss... A tale told over and  
over,

long since known by heart. Lay belly to  
back, turned belly to belly, each the other's  
dreamt accompanist, music they made in  
their sleep... Frayed hem the interstice,  
time's  
moot rule. Time's moot rule amended,  
echoed

advance it was  
also called

A first unfallen church of what might've  
been. Let run its course it would have  
gone otherwise, time's ulterior bequest...

This they had a way of imagining,

this

they so wished it to be. Abstract he  
at the back of her mind, she at the  
back of his, each the other's Nub  
constituent, ghost of an alternative

life...

They were we before we were, ancestral,

we

who'd never not be ill at ease. A vocation  
for lack he'd have said, she'd have said  
longing, a world, were they to speak, be-  
tween... What wasn't, they'd have said,

went

away, would come back, first fanatic

church,

what would  
be

.

They the would-be we talking talk of  
election, devotees of Iemanjá. Glass-  
green water they were in up to

their

shoulders, each the other's moored  
recess... The way she said his name stayed  
with him. More made of what wasn't  
there than what was, whispered,

came

back again... Love called out from side-  
walk to balcony, rooftop to galaxy,

mute...

More made of what was there than  
was there, mouths vow-heavy at  
bed's edge, lip-touch never to be done.

Never to get up again it seemed, lay

shaken,

endlessly commemorative advent,

dreamt

evanescent caress... A first unfallen  
church it might have been. Let

run its course it would have gone  
otherwise, time's ulterior bequest...

This they had a way of imagining,

this

they so wished it to be. Abstract he  
at the back of her mind, she at the  
back of his, each the other's Nub  
constituent, ghost of an alternative

life...

They were we before we were, ancestral,

we

who'd never not be ill at ease. A vocation  
for lack he'd have said, she'd have said  
longing, a world, were they to speak, be-  
tween... What wasn't, we'd have said,

went

away, would come back, first afflicted

church,

what would be... We were caught in a  
dream whispering names we'd forget  
waking up, caught waking up or in a  
dream of waking up, moot sound riffling  
our lips. Nub was a name, was

was

a name, a was a name, all moving  
on... Names came after us, roused us in  
our sleep, the ballot-box opening grinned  
and grinned again, gone we'd have been

could

we have run... It wasn't we were stuck,  
stood frozen, transfixed, Paralytic Dream #12...  
It was waking known otherwise put running  
out of reach, nonsonance's waterless waves held  
us up, more than we could sense but

sensed

even so, nonsonance's  
gaptooth  
slur

.

Day late so all the old attunements gave  
way, late but soon come even so... A  
political trek we'd have said it was  
albeit politics kept us at bay, nothing

wasn't

politics we'd say. Wanting our want to  
be called otherwise, kept at bay though  
we were, day late but all the old stories  
echoed  
yet again, old but even so soon come... A  
mystic march they'd have said it was,  
acknowledging politics kept us at  
bay, everything was mystical  
they'd say. Wanting our want to be  
so  
named, kept at bay as we were,  
what  
the matter was wasn't a question, no  
ques-  
tion what  
it was

---

Nub no longer stood but lay and we  
lay with it, earth-sway cradling our  
backs. What the matter was rocked  
us, a way we had with dirt, awaiting  
what  
already might have been there... Dust...  
Abducted future... Dearth Lake's dry  
largesse... Dread Lakes' aliases, alibis,  
Death  
Lake also there... Where we were rubbed  
earth in our faces, a feeling we had  
for debris. Nub, no longer standing,  
filled the air, an exact powder, fell  
as  
we ran thru it, earth-sway swaddling  
our  
feet

#### Song of the Andoumboulou: 258

All hands were on deck as we docked  
in the nerve church, metaphoric boat  
of soul metamorphic, boat-shaped back  
of  
the oud whose belly we rode in, ety-  
mologic boat of soul catastrophic, church  
whose nave we were in. Church cast-  
ing color cast a stain on the world. It bore

the

bright light we'd been thru, gone round  
and come thru again, metamorphic boat  
of soul metaphoric, of what no one would  
say ...

Whatever it was was what soul was, of  
which only the asker wanted to know.

All hands were on deck even so. All had  
gone

well were it only body nerve church meant,  
well were it only soul it meant, well were  
it not a thread of the two, other than either, a  
thread

and a third, off to itself. All had gone well  
that way, would've gone well were it the way,  
way that it wasn't, would that it were ... We  
lay

held in the oud whose belly was black, all  
hands on deck as we docked, bent neck and  
bent knee de rigueur in the nerve church, co-  
nundrum the head it hit. Meat and bone apart  
from

meat and bone was the nerve church, soul  
unbeknown to itself it also was, a certain some-  
thing not something notwithstanding, asked  
a-

bout no matter no answer would accrue. All  
hands were on deck proclaiming soul, soul not  
something to be said to be had, soul that was  
a

boat and that sat in the boat it was, borne  
beknown to itself. All hands were on deck not  
proclaiming soul The less we boasted the  
bet-

ter we rode the boat that soul was, the boat that  
sold

us thought to be that  
boat

.

Some were said to have limbo'd below deck,  
the lute's dark insides a madrigal of sorts, its  
back less back than belly. Some were said to  
have

bent back while surrounded by singers, bent

back so far their heads were on the floor. The backs of their heads were on the floor, it was

said,

brushed it, the back of the head a belly digesting damage, no way its way a way ... Some were said, once on deck, to have jumped, a shark's teeth or breathlessness the way, no way,

was

theirs, jumped, some said, or were thrown. We knew all this coming into the nerve church, its nave encyclopedic, no outrage not written down,

histo-

try a parable of nerve, who had it

Huff sat at the wheel of the bus calling it a boat. We were leaving Low Forest again, a sea of green he called it, all aboard as he

now

called the bus a train. Eleanoir's blue truck  
it might've been, might well have been,  
might as well have been, so metamorphic the

dock

whence we embarked ... It was nothing if not Eleanoir's dream, the ship we were in, lute of the light-lady of night, Eleanoir's loot, we

SUR-

mised. Not since primordial beak met primordial seed had it so accrued, no mile not haunted, no matter what move we made. Our

bus

put-putted a-  
long

A canopy of leaves overhead as we made our way, the sea of green Huff insisted we call it, the bus our boat and all of it the nerve

church,

nothing not inflected by the blood-guzzling  
lute whose intestines history was. Wagadu  
lay within sight even so, it or the Eleven Light  
City, Eleanoir sitting behind the driver's seat,

whis-

pering things in Huff's ear ... Eleanoir and  
Huff we'd have never thought but there it was,  
Huff under Eleanoir's influence, Eleanoir

un-

der his. A boat their bed would be, we  
heard him whisper back, his and her wish as  
much ours as theirs, that history give way  
to

romance, what lit the nerve church. Our bus  
bumped along, vestiges of memory afoot, de-  
bris the boat of soul grew laden with, the lute

our

boat also was claiming blood ... The school  
of oud instructed us, taught with drawn strings,  
taut cartilage and sinew also known as nerve  
church, our tutorial wherein, we saw, would no

time

soon recess. Eleanoir's face, which had float-  
ed many a boat, now floated Huff's it came clear  
for us to see, nerve church, whose nave we  
docked in, nuptial perhaps, our notional romance

call-

ing history moot, such the way we got by ...  
Such the way we got by proved everyday by soul  
music, Brother B said. Peaches and Herb had

come

on the box. A metaphoric love boat the meta-  
morphic boat of soul turned into now. We were  
on our way who knew where, bus, boat, train or  
truck,  
on our way wherever, soon  
come

We felt the press of consequence inside the  
nerve church, the lute's underbelly the oud,  
the madrig's underbelly the panther, the deck's

un-

derbelly the hold, metamorphic soul's under-  
belly foreboding. We were far from Low For-  
est now, far from Lone Coast, on a train from

Bar-

celona to Lyon. Eleanoir slept lying across the  
seat across from Itamar and me, her head on  
Huff's lap. Her small feet peeped out beautifully

from

under the blanket she lay wrapped up in... The  
train was a boat or it would take us to a boat,  
unclear which, the boat of soul that lay docked in the  
nerve church, all hands on deck awaiting us, if not,

ac-

cording to some, none other than us. It was night,  
nothing visible outside our windows. The commis-  
erative dead gauged our quotient of soul, no one able  
to say what it was though we rode it, the riding alone

was

clear... The train ran away with us, took us away,  
soul riding us it seemed, warm and humid with the  
breath and the breathing of bodies, a blind winding

or

a boat finding its way thru the night. There was  
no way to know it but by its effects, Itamar was say-  
ing, an array of aromas we took to pertain thereto

per-

vading our  
car

---

Voces fell from the sky, never not  
inflected by the dead on the sea floor,  
the dead under leaf, needle and cone in

Low

Forest, the dead and how they came  
to be that way everywhere... They spoke  
of this as the bus rattled on, the boat

cut

thru water, the truck struggled going  
up a mountain, the train cried arkestral,  
soul bumped again and again against

what

would not  
have it

—“mu” forty-eighth part—

“While we’re alive,” we kept  
repeating. Tongues, throats,  
roofs of our mouths bone dry,  
skeletons we’d someday

be...

Panicky masks we wore for

effect more than effect,  
more real than we'd admit...

No longer wanting to know  
what soul was, happy to

see

shadow, know touch...

Happy to have sun at our  
backs, way led by shadow,  
happy to have bodies, block

light...

Afternoon sun lighting leaf,  
glint of glass, no matter what,  
about to be out of body it

seemed...

Soon to be shadowless we thought,  
said we thought, not to be offguard,  
caught out. Gray morning we

meant

to be done with, requiem so  
sweet we forgot what it lamented,

teeth

turning to sugar, we  
grinned

.

Day after day of the dead we were  
desperate. Dark what the night  
before we saw lit, bones we'd  
eventually be... At day's end a

new

tally but there it was, barely  
begun,  
rock the clock tower let go of,  
iridescent headstone, moment's  
rebuff... Soul, we saw, said we

saw,

invisible imprint. No one wanted to

know

what soul was... Day after day of  
the dead we were deaf, numb to  
what the night before we said moved

us,

fey light's coded locale... I fell away,  
we momentarily gone, deaf but to

We wore capes under which we  
were in sweaters out at the elbow.  
Arms on the table, we chewed our  
spoons...

Mouthing the blues, moaned an abstract truth, kept eating. The dead's morning-after buffet someone said it was. Feast of the

shoveling it in... Day after day  
of the dead we were them. We  
ate inexhaustibly, ate what wasn't

dead no longer dying of thirst,  
hung over, turned our noses up  
to  
what

It was me, we were it, insensate,  
sugared sweat what what we drank  
tasted like. Even so, the tips of  
our

tongues tasted nothing, we sipped  
without wincing... We ate cakes,

we

ate fingernail soup, a new kind of  
gazpacho, no one willing to say  
what soul was... Knucklebone  
soufflé we ate, we ate gristle, eyes

we

took from flies flying backward  
a kind of caviar, none of us wanting  
to say

what soul  
was

—“mu” *sixty-first part*—

Gray morning, blue morning, a  
feather blown between. Mashed  
earth incumbent, gone up from,

never

more naked if ever to be naked,  
brink what it was to be on...

Where next we came stick-figure  
people greeted us. Abstract

was

abstract, also something else. Line,  
shape, extension each other  
than itself, of number we'd have  
said the same... Aspect arrested  
us, riveted we stood... Stick-  
figure epiphany held us in our

tracks,

everyone's bones in full view...

Gray

morning, blue morning, an unheard  
string between. Bad heads' morning  
reluctance, ennui's next-day dispatch...

We

were chill, shiver, exegetic sweat, backed-  
up interpreters put upon by sluff, none  
of us could say what was what. Pale  
admonishment poised upon lack,

like

to unlike, pale strain recumbent, re-  
combinant, rude amniotic straw...  
Took leave, leave long since taken,

awoke

to what would otherwise not have been.  
We contested birth, we wanted to be pre-  
andoumboulous, done-dead gnostics  
again...

Sound bubbled up, it kept bubbling, sonic  
residue, sonic remit. A fickle sonance,  
fraught sonance, warning we knew nothing,  
stick-figure entourage otherwise issue-  
less, beginning to be remiss it seemed...

Erst-

while ecstasies' lapsed enchantment, trance  
gone none could say since when...

Ghost

of what lifted us, ghost what lifted us,  
erstwhile  
enchantment between... Fell back, full-out  
extended. Pilgrim someone called me, I said  
no, then I said yes... Brax was on the box  
was what it was, toned uncertainty Stick-figure  
counsel all air, edge, angle, down from where  
we'd

been and we were again where the Alone lived,  
adage, had it not been so abstract, it might've  
been... Long day of the abalone-shell sunset...

Stood

among redwoods expecting the worst... What  
was of note and what abjured nothing. What  
was  
all, none, one, all the  
same

---

It was a ghost of a trance. I was a  
guest of the trance. What went on we  
blamed on the ghost... It was the  
ghost of a trance, each of us a  
guest  
of the trance. No two times were the  
same...

When we hit a wrong note we said  
nothing. When we hit the right note  
we said so what... Tell my horse,  
we were told, fluke solace, horse  
we  
were mounted by... What was done

was done by the ghost, gray morning,  
blue  
morning, eternity be-  
tween

---

Told my horse we would gather at  
Nod House, down drinks at the  
no-host bar. Dirt was in the drinks  
we  
drank, planet sludge. Double-take  
told its horse whoa, told it unwhoa,  
back and forth and back without  
end... Talk spun our heads,  
told  
our horses ride on. Unresolved  
which to insist on, stick with. Could it  
whoa unwhoa's ramble unresolved...

Spinning heads made us feel we sat on  
swivel  
seats... Double-take talked us in,  
took  
us in

---

Sat again at the same table, no two  
times the same, twinship long since  
gone. Leaned back, the back legs of  
our chairs broke, Nod House Nub's  
new  
address... A straining look made our  
faces look raw, made our skin flush...  
Dreamt each other's dream, donned  
each  
other's costume, hosted one another,  
one  
stepped in as  
one stepped  
out

— “mu” one hundred eighteenth part —

Heaved our bags and headed out again. Again  
the ground that was to've been there wasn't.  
Bits of ripcord crowded the box my head had

be-  
come, the sense we were a band was back,  
the sense we were a band or in a band... The  
rotating gate time turned out to be creaked,  
we  
pulled away. Lord Invader's Reform School  
Band it was we were in, the Pseudo-Dionysian  
Fife Corps, the Muvian Wind Xtet... The sense  
we were a band or were in a band had come  
back,  
names' wicked sense we called timbre, num-  
bers' crooked sense our bequest. Clasp it tee-  
tered near to, abstraction, band was what to  
be  
there was... Band was what it was to be there  
we shouted, band all we thought it would  
be. Band was a chant, that we chanted, what  
we  
chanted, chant said it all would be alright...  
A new band, our new name was the Abandoned  
Ones, no surprise. We dwelt in the well-being  
that  
awaited us, never not sure we'd get there, what  
way we were yet to know. I stood pat, a rickety  
sixty-six, tapped out a scarecrow jig in waltz  
time, big toe blunt inside my shoe... Who was I to  
so  
rhapsodize I chided myself, who to so mark my-  
self, chill teeth suddenly forming reforming,  
who to let my heart out so... To be at odds with  
my-  
self resounded, sound's own City the wall I hit  
my head against, polis was to be and to be so hit...  
We heard clamor, clash, blue consonance, noise's  
low  
sibling  
sense

---

We pumped our arms as though they were  
pistons, elbows in and out. We nicked our  
name to Abandon. Abandon was our name  
now...  
Thus was our music no music. Music too  
we left behind. Everything beside the point  
that there was no point, everything thus the

To have been there wasn't dasein. No Heidegger told my horse. Trussed up to the side it sat, pressed and preponderant,  
SOV-

ereign, self-contained, were it music the music we sloughed... Slipped accompaniment, surrogate cloud, rapt adjournment. Agitant. Surrogate cue... I kept clear of it,  
caught  
up at arm's length, all but caught out I came to see... Thus was our music no music it seemed I said, mujic more than music I might've said,  
might  
as well have said, no matter I mumbled otherwise under my breath... The Freedmen's Debate Society our name now was, the Ox Tongue Speaker Exchange. Fractal scratch. Nominative  
ser-  
ration. Cutaway run, cutaway arrest... Thus was our music no music I did say, say's default on sing such as it was... We called it history even  
so,  
insisted it, the it crowding the corner of everyone's eye. None of us were not crept up on, none not required we sing it, say it. Thus was  
our  
say not  
so

Beginning again for the muleteenth time,  
we counted off. It was our muleeenth  
breakdown, muleenth new beginning...  
Brass  
rubbed off on our lips, reed rubbed off as  
well, string steel left on our fingertips, stick

left on our  
thumbs